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ADDRESS

TO THE

STUDENTS OF THE SCHOOL OF ART,
EDINBURGH,

BY

SIR WM. STIRLING-MAXWELL, BART.

ADDRESS

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TO THE

STUDENTS OF THE SCHOOL OF ART,
EDINBURGH,

UNDER CHARGE OF THE

Hon. the Commissioners of the Board of Manufactures,

AT THE

DELIVERY OF PRIZES, JANUARY 13, 1870.

BY

SIR WM. STIRLING-MAXWELL, BART.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY MURRAY AND GIBB,

FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

1870.

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ADDRESS

BY THE

STUDENTS OF THE SCHOOL OF ART,
EDINBURGH.

PRESENTED TO THE

FROM THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

IN THE

DELIVERY OF PRIZES, JANUARY 18, 1870.

BY

MR. W. STIRLING-MAXWELL, B.A.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY MURRAY AND GIBB.

FOR THE HALLS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

1870.

ADDRESS.

IN addressing you at a time when the administrative institutions of Scotland are being submitted to inquiry, it may be interesting to some of you to know something of the Board under whose authority we are here assembled.

By the fifteenth article of the Treaty of Union, concluded between England and Scotland in 1705, amongst other provisions for giving some equivalent to Scotland for an increase of duties of Customs and Excise, it was agreed that £2000 a year should for some years be applied towards encouraging and promoting the manufacture of coarse wool in those shires which produced wool, and afterwards wholly employed towards "encouraging and promoting the fisheries, and such other manufactures and improvements in Scotland as may most conduce to the general good of the United Kingdom." In 1718 this £2000 was made payable for ever out of the Customs and Excise in Scotland. In 1725 an addition was made to this sum by an Act which provided, that when the produce of threepence per bushel to be laid on malt should exceed £20,000 a year, such surplus should be added to it, and applied to the

like purposes. The year following, the Crown was empowered to appoint twenty-one trustees, who were named in 1727 by letters patent, which prescribed their duties and the plan of expending of the funds at their disposal in the encouragement of fisheries, and of the woollen, linen, and hempen manufactures. Under these trustees and their successors the business of the Board was carried on for about a century until 1828, with little change of system, except that in 1809 the number of trustees was increased from twenty-one to twenty-eight, and out of that number the Crown was empowered to appoint seven to be Commissioners of the Herring Fishery; and from that time the Fishery Board and the Board of Manufactures have virtually been separate bodies. In 1828 new letters patent were issued, giving to the trustees a wider discretion, by empowering them to apply their funds to the encouragement not only of manufactures, but also of such other undertakings in Scotland as should most conduce to the general good of the United Kingdom. In 1847 an Act was passed by which the Treasury was enabled to direct the appropriation of their funds towards the purposes of education in the fine arts generally, and in decorative and ornamental art, and in taste and design in manufacture. In the same year, Sir John Shaw Lefevre was sent down by the Government of the day to report on the constitution and management of the Board, and the erection of galleries of art in Edinburgh. The result of that report, and subsequent negotiations with the Treasury, was the erection of the galleries in which we are now

assembled, of which the late Prince Consort laid the foundation-stone in August 1850, and which were opened in 1859. These galleries were constructed by the co-operation of the Treasury, this Board, and the city of Edinburgh—the Treasury furnishing £30,000, the Board £20,000, and the city a portion of the site at a nominal rate. By these arrangements the public have obtained a National Gallery of great and increasing value, to which the munificence of the Royal Scottish Society of Antiquaries has added a noble museum of antiquities, on condition that it be lodged and exhibited at the public expense. The Royal Scottish Academy has also been provided with rooms for its annual exhibitions; and that distinguished body has not only been associated with this Board in the guardianship of the National Gallery, but has been a generous contributor to the collection. The foundation of the national collection, I may observe, was formed by the Royal Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, a body founded in 1819. By these various extensions of its powers, the Board was enabled greatly to improve its School of Design, which had its origin in 1760. On the 27th of June of that year, in pursuance of previous deliberations of the Board, as our records inform us, a “scheme or scroll of an advertisement anent the drawing-school was read, and it was referred to Lord Kames to take evidence of the capacity and genius for drawing of persons applying for instruction before they be presented to the drawing-school, and to report when the salary of Mr Délacour, painter, who had been appointed to

teach the school, should commence." This, we believe, to have been the first School of Design established in these kingdoms at the public expense. One of the most important contributions to the knowledge of "the best means of ameliorating arts and manufactures, in point of taste," was the remarkable letter addressed to Lord Meadowbank and the Committee of this Board on that subject in 1837, by the late Mr Dyce, one of our most distinguished of Scottish artists, and Mr Charles Heath Wilson, also well known for his skill as an artist, and for his vast and sound stores of art learning. In that letter, it is not too much to say that all the chief principles, accepted and brought into active operation by the present Science and Art Department, are enunciated and explained. It is a matter of no small pride to us as Scotchmen, to find a Scottish judge in 1760, and two Scotch painters in 1837, taking the lead in a movement which, in each case, became national. When the Royal Scottish Academy was in a position to open its doors to art pupils, the life-school was transferred from the schools of the Board to the Academy. This is the last event in their history which it is necessary to notice. Nor of the success of these schools need I say more, than that almost every one of our countrymen who has become distinguished in art, has owed something of that distinction to training received here. The services rendered to art and manufacture by the Board have been acknowledged on many occasions by the various Governments of Her Majesty and her predecessors; and in recent years these

acknowledgments have invariably included special mention of the ability and energy displayed by the secretary, Mr Primrose, in the large transactions of which he has had a principal management and control.

I will now address myself to those whom this meeting more immediately concerns—the students in the School of Design. To those who are engaged in the acquisition of knowledge, especially to the young, the close of a year is always an important event. “What have I done during the past year? What do I know or can I do that I did not know or could not do when the year begun?” are questions which every earnest student will ask himself. An annual examination and competition for prizes is the means by which teaching institutions can most effectively put these questions to those who resort to them to be taught. The prizes, small though they be in actual and intrinsic value, possess a very real value to all minds of the better order. They are tokens of the sympathy with which the institution, in this case the State, regards the exertions of its students. They are rewards which those who now sit, or have sat, in the high places of a noble profession—the Harveys, the Patons, the Faeds, the Robertses, and the Wilkies—have been proud to win, and whose success in their early competitions was the beginning of a long series of triumphs. The taking of one of these prizes often turns out to have been an important step in the business of real life. Even failure in the race is not without its uses and its consolations, when the race has brought speed to the foot and endurance to the frame. Habits of

industry and application may have been formed which are of themselves no mean prizes. It is even possible that the disappointed competitor, when the knowledge and skill with which he began the year is compared with that which he has acquired during its course, may be found to have made more signal progress than some of those who have been successful.

On the advantages which accrue to a country or community from the cultivation of art, the world may be said to be agreed. Every civilised country not only places its artists amongst the most honoured of its worthies, but creates or encourages, at the public expense, institutions for the purpose of fostering and diffusing artistic skill and taste. As the tide of generations sweep on, and as each generation gives to the roll of fame its selected names; as Raphael and Titian are followed by Rubens and Vandyke; as Sir Joshua and Sir Henry pass away, and the Exhibitions which knew their works are adorned in turn by those of Sir Francis, Sir George, and Sir Noel,—the artist finds not only the noble brotherhood alive and behind him increasing in numbers and reputation, but the public around and before him also vastly increasing in its interest in his art, and in intelligent appreciation of his labours. There is more talk, more writing, perhaps even more thought, about art than at any previous period of our history. The career of a man who follows high art as a profession is, as you all know, an anxious and uncertain one; and great merit does not always command success. But when success is attained, its rewards are certainly sufficiently splendid. Yet,

with all this, how much remains to be desired! When we look back to other days, how poor are our triumphs! There were giants in those days whose breed is extinct. Division of labour, which is supposed to enhance the excellence of workmanship, has not improved the quality of the highest work. It is long since the world has seen a genius who could paint Giotto's Chapel at Padua, and rear Giotto's Tower at Florence; who could model a Lorenzo and a Guliano, paint a Sistine Last Judgment, and crown with its majestic cornice a Farnese Palace; or who could even dash off the gorgeous compositions and fantastic façades with which Rubens delighted the princes of the House of Austria and the merchant princes of Antwerp.

Look at the state of architecture—that art by which a stranger first measures the artistic taste and capacity of a nation. In this city we may point with complacency to some of our public buildings, the works of Playfair and Bryce. Our western capital has its noble university, now rising in renewed splendour by the Clyde. But glance over to Paris, the great old town which within a few years has been turned into a huge new town, and is now supposed to be the model Vanity Fair of the world. New Paris, no doubt, can boast of that noble breadth of space and carelessness of cost in which architecture delights, which a military despotism can command, and a municipal debt of thirty millions sterling can explain. But when we recover from the bewilderment into which we are thrown by miles of wide boulevard and leagues of monotonous street, and examine the

work in detail, I think the result is disappointment. I see no modern building, new from the ground, which will take rank with the old masterpieces. The great achievements of the Second Empire are the completed Tuileries and Louvre and the renovated Hotel de Ville, and very noble works they are. But grand as they are, they are nothing more than a skilful repetition of notes struck out in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which the ideas of older architects are reproduced, and the H. and L. of the old French sovereigns replaced by the N. of the Corsican. In the chaos of ill-regulated boroughs called London, architecture has still less to boast of. Some fine private edifices in the City and West End, always copied from old models, the bridges, and a few colossal railway stations, impressive by their vastness, are almost all the modern works we have to show to strangers. In my own time the one metropolitan work that in my opinion may be considered a great success is a single wall—the noble river wall that now faces the northern bank of the Thames from Westminster to the Temple.

Descending from great things to small, I think it can be shown, that if, on the one hand, art has been widely diffused of late years, and has found its way into industries which were once supposed to lie beyond its province, yet, on the other, there are places which once knew it but now know it no more. Look at our books and printing. Of illustrated and other books professing to be artistic, we have an immense number, of all degrees of merit—sometimes embellished with prints, usually woodcuts,

of great power and excellence; sometimes reproducing, and not seldom caricaturing, ancient examples, illuminations, and miniatures, in chromoliths gleaming in purple and gold: but these are generally books of luxury, and not for common use. But in our books intended for the million, it seems to me that our printers fall far behind the elder brethren of their craft. At the beginning of the Reformation struggle in Germany, when the young Kaiser Karl rode from Flanders to hold his first Diet at Worms, and the stout Saxon monk was called to account for the heretical sermons and tracts he had been preaching and publishing at Wittenburg, I presume neither Martin Luther nor his publishers took much thought about the getting up of those celebrated pamphlets. Those in his own racy German were printed to rouse his countrymen from the Baltic to the Alps; those in his barbarous Latin were intended for wider circulation—to be smuggled into Italy, or run in casks on the orthodox shores of Spain. Dilletantism had nothing to do with their birth. The author was as careless of Cicero and the classics as of the pope and cardinals, and the printer was no doubt left to print them as he could or would. Yet those fiery pamphlets, rude as in some respects they are, are generally embellished with woodcut frontispieces and initial letters, and occasionally with portraits of a bold and masterly character. For the sake of these embellishments, the original editions of these and many other polemical writings of that age are sought for by many collectors besides those who prize them as some of the earliest fruits of the tree of

modern free thought. They are the natural prey of the frivolous but not altogether useless being, the book-hunter, whom Mr Burton has made so popular. I fear the book-hunters of the future will find no similar inducements to compete for first editions of the sermons of Dr Chalmers or Dr Caird, or of the novels of Sir Walter Scott. The works issued by the Aldi, the Gioliti, the Giunti, by Marcolini, Sansovino, the Etiennes, and De Tournes, and other Italian and French printers who might be named, were many of them small and cheap, and intended for the widest circulation then obtainable. Yet what artistic feeling and grace lives and breathes in every line of their slightest embellishments! what fancy and poetry in their more elaborate designs and devices! In some of the larger and graver books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—books that were not necessarily more artistic than similar works now—we find an exuberance of graphic power. The supply of that pleasant article in those days appears to have far exceeded the demand, to have been a supply like that of daisies and cowslips and lilies of the field, which flourish without any regard to the principles of Adam Smith. The geographical works of those times have a flavour of design about them which modern practice has discarded. How beautiful, for example, are the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* of Braun, published at Cologne about 1570; Saxton's earlier English maps; and the later atlases of Ortelius, Speed, or Bleaw, with their bird's-eye views, and their varied heraldry and costumes! The scientific knowledge of the old geographers

was of course limited, but what they had they served up in a more agreeable form than the more accurate and far-seen moderns. At a pinch they

“in their Afric maps
With savage pictures filled their gaps,
And o'er unhabitable downs
Placed elephants, for want of towns.”

But they produced monumental works which will linger even in select libraries, saved by the skill and fancy of the old draughtsmen. When conquest, revolution, or railways render our best modern maps obsolete—and they become obsolete very fast—they will be ruthlessly swept away into the limbo of old almanacs and blue-books. Being destitute of savage pictures and elephants, our friend the book-hunter will leave them to their natural fate.

In some branches of art our modern artists need certainly fear no comparison. A new era dawned for landscape painting when Turner first saw the sun, whose endless effects he has recorded in so many immortal pictures. If there be any subject on which our age may fairly claim credit more than another, it is its patient and laborious study of nature, and in the general reverence which is paid to our heirlooms, the masterpieces of art. It would be impossible, I suppose, for any man so intelligent as Captain Burt, the engineer officer, to whom is attributed the “Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland,” about 1730, to write or think as he wrote about scenery—to apologize for speaking of the mountains as “a disagreeable subject,” “the clearer the day the more harsh and offensive to the

sight," and "most of all disagreeable when the heather is in bloom!" No clever young woman like Mrs Calderwood in 1746, would remark, in her journal, of Durham Cathedral nothing more than that "it was a church of huge and ridiculous bigness." Nor is any poetical peer of the present day likely to imitate the enterprise of "Granville the Polite," who both re-wrote the "Merchant of Venice," and published it with the sprightly title—"The Jew of Venice, originally written by William Shakespeare, and now altered and greatly improved by George Lord Landsdowne."

It is a matter, we think, of great importance, and one which we observe with satisfaction, that the ranks of our students are recruited from almost all orders and conditions of men. The love of art is found to exist in all soils, even in those where it might be least expected. Our medallist to-day is, I believe, the son of a fisherman, and his drawings display not only great merit, but great versatility of skill. The analysis of occupations of our students presents a most variegated list,—indeed, it reads like a town directory. The callings that naturally ally themselves with the arts of design are by no means the only callings that are represented. On one circumstance only in this curious list I will remark. We find amongst our students one corn-cutter, and only one die-cutter. I must say that, while we are glad to welcome chiropedism to our schools, we might expect to see, and we should be glad to see, the various interesting branches of industry into which die-cutting enters

more largely represented. Those of you who purpose pursuing the higher walks of art will find plenty of unoccupied ground—indeed, plenty of ground formerly cultivated and now lying waste. Those who, contenting themselves with humbler aims, and obscurer and perhaps safer regions, mean to devote their artistic knowledge and skill to manufacturing purposes, have also a wide field before them—a field of which scarcely more than the border has been touched—in the task of diffusing beauty over common things, and by the silent influence of their works training up youthful and erratic taste in the way it should go, and adding to the material grace and favour of our homes. Even those of you whose studies here have been undertaken with no professional view, will, I believe, in after-life find no reason to regret the time spent within these walls. To acquire some practical knowledge of art is to acquire a higher, because a more intelligent, relish for the beauties both of art and nature. Drawing, essential to the artist, is no mere agreeable accomplishment even to the amateur. To both it is in some degree a wholesome moral lesson. It brings them face to face with facts, simple or complex. It compels them to look at things with close and minute attention, to take good heed of their qualities of form, colour, and texture. To improve or strengthen any one of our physical or mental faculties is to benefit all the rest. I believe it to be impossible to acquire, I will not say a masterly, but any tolerable veracity of eye and hand, without also acquiring habits which tend to produce or pro-

mote veracity of intellect and conscience. Above all, let me recommend diligence in the studies which you come here to pursue. "Where are you going through the snow?" said Cardinal Farnese to Michael Angelo, meeting the veteran artist on his way to the Coliseum. "I am going to learn something more," was the reply. I shall always remember, as an interesting sight, in visiting one hot summer afternoon, as a member of a commission of the Royal Academy, the most inconvenient little room in which the life-school was then held, the drum under the central dome in Trafalgar Square. In that narrow space five or six pupils were drawing from a model; and there, working with them as diligently as any of them, stood old Mulready, aged eighty, and already famous in the days of their grandfathers. Depend upon it, genius, or talent, or whatever name you may choose to give to any special capacity or bias of the mind, may determine for you your path in life, but industry alone will enable you to follow it with credit and success. Without industry, genius will droop and wither—perishing like superfluous blossoms which fall beneath the tree, instead of ripening to fair fruit upon its branches.

It now only remains for me to express the thanks of the Board—thanks in which I feel sure the students will join—to the masters and mistresses of the schools—Mr Hodder, Mr Morley, Miss Ashworth, and Miss Byres, and to congratulate them on the very pleasing and promising exhibition their care has this day afforded us.